

Message Text

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PAGE 01 PANAMA 06096 251414Z
ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00
PA-01 USIA-06 PRS-01 SP-02 PM-05 NSC-05 SS-15
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FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA
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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PORS, ETRN, PN
SUBJECT: CANAL ZONE BORDER INCIDENT

1. "CRITICA" IS BAITING THE ZONIANS AGAIN. UNDER THE HEADLINE "ZONE POLICE OUTRAGE PANAMANIAN," CRITICA, ALONE OF THE CAPITAL'S FOUR MORNING DAILIES, REPORTS THAT ON AUGUST 23 AFTER A VEHICLE COLLISION INVOLVING HIS CAR ON FOURTH OF JULY AVENUE, PANAMANIAN EDUARDO BALLESTER VEGA WAS ARRESTED BY CZ POLICE. A CROWD GATHERED TO PROTEST. SOME NATIONAL GUARD (GN) WERE OBSERVERS. A DOZEN CZ POLICEMENT REPORTEDLY DREW THEIR REVOLVERS, SQUIRTED "TEAR GAS BOMBS" (PROBABLY SHOULD READ MACE), AND SHOVED A SEVEN-MONTH PREGNANT WOMAN WHO PROTESTED THE ARREST. THE NEWSPAPER REPORTS BALLESTER IS JAILED IN THE CANAL ZONE UNDER \$300 BOND AND IS SCHEDULED TO APPEAR BEFORE BALBOA MAGISTRATE COURT CHARGED WITH RECKLESS DRIVING AND POSSIBLE "BEING UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF ALCOHOL." CRITICA ALSO REPORTED THAT THE GN MEMBERS AT THE SCENE TOLD CZ POLICE THAT IF THEY FIRED THEIR WEAPONS, THE GN WOULD REPLY IN KIND.

2. THE CANAL ZONE GOVERNMENT REPORTED THE FOLLOWING VERSION: AT APPROXIMATELY 5:00 PM AUGUST 23, BALLESTER'S
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PAGE 02 PANAMA 06096 251414Z

VEHICLE STRUCK A SECOND VEHICLE ON FOURTH OF JULY AVENUE. A CZ POLICE UNIT RESPONDED FOLLOWED SOON AFTER BY AN-OTHER CZ POLICE UNIT. CZ POLICE BELIEVED BALLESTER, WHO ADMITTED HAVING HAD A FEW BEERS, WAS INTOXICATED. HE WAS ASKED TO GO TO BALBOA, CZ POLICE STATION. EGGED ON BY HIS STEPFATHER, ROLANDO SAMANIEGO, A PASSENGER IN HIS VEHICLE, BALLESTER (22 YEARS OLD) REFUSED. SAMANIEGO,

SCREAMING, GRABBED A CZ POLICEMAN. A CROWD OF 70-80 PEOPLE HAD GATHERED AND ROCKS AND BOTTLES WERE THROWN. MORE CZ POLICE AND GN UNITS ARRIVED. CZ POLICE ASKED GN PERSONNEL ON THE SCENE TO CONTROL THE CROWD. THE GN DID NOT RPT NOT RESPOND. A MAN APPROACHED THE CZ POLICE CARRYING A 25 GALLON CAN AS IF TO THROW IT. A CA POLICEMAN DREW HIS REVOLVER AND TOLD THE CROWD AND THE MAN WITH THE CAN TO DISPERSE. AT THE SAME TIME A GN MEMBER GOT ON A LOUDSPEAKER TO ANNOUNCE THAT IF THE CZ POLICE FIRED THEIR WEAPONS, THE GN WOULD FIRE THEIRS.

3. BALLESTER WAS PUT INTO A CZ POLICE CAR. THE POLICE VEHICLE WAS RAMMED BY A GN TOW-TRUCK-CAUSING MINOR DAMAGE. THE SAME TOW-TRUCK STRUCK A SECOND CZ POLICE VEHICLE CAUSING IT TO STRIKE THE FIRST CARRYING BALLESTER, BUT IT WAS ABLE TO PROCEED ON TO BALBOA POLICE STATION. CANAL ZONE POLICE THEN WITHDREW LEAVING GN ON THE SCENE.

4. BALLESTER TOOK A BREATH TEST; THE RESULTS INDICATED HE WAS INTOXICATED. HE IS UNDER \$300 BOND, NOT POSTED, AND IS SCHEDULED TO APPEAR IN BALBOA MAGISTRATE COURT ON AUGUST 25. END CZ GOVERNMENT VERSION.

5. COMMENT: FOURTH OF JULY AVENUE--"AVENIDA DE LOS MARTIRES"--IS A MAJOR TRAFFIC ARTERY FOR PANAMA BUT UNDER CZ JURISDICTION. THIS INCIDENT, WHICH CLEARLY LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 PANAMA 06096 251414Z

COULD HAVE BECOME SERIOUS, DEMONSTRATES A POTENTIAL FOR BLOODY VIOLENCE. AND, EVEN WITH THE PROSPECT OF A NEW TREATY, CRITICA CONTINUES ITS "ZONIAN" BAITING WAYS. JORDEN

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Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 24-Aug-1977 12:00:00 am
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Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
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